

Ginseng-the dietary benefits of the ancient healer food

Sudhamani Ramakrishnan

Food is essential for all living creatures, and the source of food for all organisms differs. For instance, autotrophic plants make their food from sunlight, water and soil nutrients. On the other hand, animals are consumers and they use plants and smaller animals as their food source. Irrespective of the source, the main constituents remain the same macronutrients (carbohydrates, proteins and fat) and micronutrients (vitamins and minerals) that are extremely important to sustain life. Currently, people around the world are becoming increasingly health-conscious. They are looking for diet plans that could give them maximum nutrition in small servings. People are diverting their attention from the quantitative to the qualitative aspect of their food. This has brought to light one superfood, that is, Korean red ginseng. Korean ginseng, also known as Panax ginseng, belongs to the family of Araliaceae. The roots of this plant, including the smaller lateral roots, have been a valuable part of traditional Chinese medicine preparation. Korean ginseng is available in two different forms based on its preparation: white ginseng and Korean red ginseng (KRG). The white ginseng is harvested between 4 to 6 years, peeled and air-dried to reduce the water content to 12% or less. On the other hand, red ginseng undergoes further processing. After the original white roots are harvested, they are sorted by size and cleaned. They are then exposed to hot airflow at 120 to 130°C. As a result, the roots turn reddish and their surface becomes firm and glassy. Further, ginseng contains two significant compounds, namely, ginsenosides and gintonin. These compounds complement one another to provide numerous health benefits. Some of its noted and scientifically proven benefits are its antioxidant potency and anti-inflammatory properties. It has shown positive results in boosting immunity, protecting against oxidative stress, treating erectile dysfunction and chronic liver diseases. Studies also reveal that it possesses antiviral, anti-cancer and anti-asthmatic properties. Parallely, its consumption needs proper guidance in the case of diabetic patients, children, pregnant and lactating women. Some drugs, such as aspirin, warfarin, phenelzine, anticoagulant drugs, etc., are observed to be incompatible with ginseng. Headaches, diarrhoea, nausea, and insomnia are some of its minor side effects. Thus, it can be said that this food compound has the potential to be the future as it can provide high nutrition and energy, even in conditions of food scarcity. With more research and biotechnological interventions, it is possible to overcome its limitations and make this super-food reach everyone.

Keywords: Food, Korean red ginseng, Araliaceae, Ginsenosides, Gintonin

Citation:

Sudhamani Ramakrishnan. Ginseng-the dietary benefits of the ancient healer food. The Torch. 2023. 4(18). Available from: <https://www.styvalley.com/pub/magazines/torch/read/ginseng-the-dietary-benefits-of-the-ancient-healer-food>.